

Phil 433/535 Topics in Social and Political Philosophy: The political philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Spring 2024

Instructor: Peter Dietsch, PhD
Lectures: W 2:30-5:20
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Seminar description

The objective of the seminar is to provide students with an in-depth knowledge of the principal works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s political philosophy, with special attention to his normative evaluation of socio-economic inequalities. In the first part of the seminar, we will read primary texts, whereas the second part focuses on Frederick Neuhouser’s book *Rousseau’s Critique of Inequality*.

Course Website

Online materials will be made available via Uvic Brightspace. Access your customized Brightspace page by signing in to Uvic and clicking on Online Tools. You should see Brightspace as an option.

Texts

Most texts are available through the library (see links further down in the syllabus). Where there is no online access available, texts may be provided on Brightspace.

Grading System

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definition
90 – 100	A+	9	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior , shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
85 – 89	A	8	
80 – 84	A-	7	
77 – 79	B+	6	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student’s full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
73 – 76	B	5	
70 – 72	B-	4	
65 – 69	C+	3	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.
60 – 64	C	2	
50 – 59	D	1	A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
0 – 49	F	0	F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.

Interpretation of these grade definitions is up to the discretion of the instructor. If you receive a grade during the course that you believe is unfair, please begin by discussing the matter with the instructor (or TA) in a respectful, open-minded manner. Rest assured that if you still believe the grade you received is unfair you can appeal the matter to the chair of the department.

For additional information regarding undergraduate grades, please consult the [Grading](#) section of the Uvic Undergraduate Calendar.

All evaluations of tests and assignments will be calculated according to percentage scores. Letter grades and grade point scores are listed purely for reference.

Final examinations are the property of Uvic and are not returned. They are available for viewing at the Records Office according to Uvic Examinations procedures and regulations.

Uvic is committed to providing a safe, supportive learning environment for all members. Further information regarding Uvic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are located in the Uvic calendar [General University Policies](#), but if you have any particular concerns related to our course please do not hesitate to contact me.

Graded student activities

- One 4000-word essay to be handed in on April 3rd 2024 (50%)
- One presentation (20%) and one commentary (10%)
- Participation in seminar discussion (20%)

Policy on Late Assignments

5% per working day will be subtracted from grade unless students are delayed by illness or family emergency.

Plagiarism

Review the [University Policy on Academic Integrity](#) very carefully, and be aware that anti-plagiarism software may be used in this course. Resources will be provided via Brightspace for students seeking guidance about what constitutes plagiarism and how they can avoid it, but it is the responsibility of each student to be informed about these details.

Counseling Services

Many, if not most, students experience some difficulties with their mental health during their years as undergraduate students. Make sure you are familiar with [Uvic Counseling Services](#), which is an excellent resource you have at your disposal on campus. It is hard to shake the stigma associated with problems like depression and anxiety, but if at any point you can benefit from help with mental health issues, please contact Counseling Services. They genuinely want to help, and why not take advantage of this free resource?

Important Dates

Please consult the Uvic calendar's [Academic Year Important Dates](#) for information about last possible dates to withdraw from courses without penalty, examinations period start/end dates, etc.

Technology in Classroom

Chat GPT is not permitted for this course. Some students require laptops or voice recognition apps for their learning strategies, so I do not prohibit their use in the classroom. However, studies demonstrate that multi-tasking reduces the performance of other nearby students. Therefore, I strongly discourage the use of computers in the classroom. Anyone caught on social media, internet surfing, etc. will be asked to leave and potentially subject to disciplinary action.

Standards for Professional Behaviour

Professionalism is expected from all students enrolled in courses in the Faculty of Humanities. As part of professionalism, students, faculty and staff are expected to be familiar with University policies, including the [Tri-Faculty's Standards for Professional Behaviour](#).

Uvic Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response

Learn more about preventing sexualized violence by visiting www.uvic.ca/svp. If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexualized violence and needs advice, and/or support, please contact the Sexualized Violence Resource Office in EQHR, Sedgewick C119; email: svpcoordinator@uvic.ca.

Territory Acknowledgment

The University of Victoria is committed to acknowledging and respecting the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. For information about support for indigenous students and efforts to foster reconciliation, please visit the Uvic [Office of Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement](#).

Detailed seminar plan

Week 1 (Jan 10): Introduction

Part I: Primary texts

Week 2 (Jan 17): A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (Second Discourse)

- (Dedication, Preface, Introduction &) **First Part**, from: Susan Dunn (ed.), *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, Yale University Press, 2002, available through the library at <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/j.ctt1npwsh.6>

Week 3 (Jan 24): A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (Second Discourse)

- **Second Part** (same link as above)

Week 4 (Jan 31): A Discourse on Political Economy

- From: Victor Gourevitch (ed. and translated), *Rousseau – The Social Contract and other later political writings*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp.3-38.

Week 5 (Feb 7): The Social Contract

- **Book I and first three chapters of Book II**, from: Susan Dunn (ed.), *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, Yale University Press, 2002, available through the library at <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/j.ctt1npwsh.7>

Week 6 (Feb 14): The Social Contract

- **Rest of Book II** (same link as above)

READING WEEK

Week 7 (Feb 28): *The Social Contract*

- **Book III** (same link as above)

Week 8 (Mar 6): *The Social Contract*

- **Book IV** (same link as above)

Part II:

Week 9 (Mar 13): Neuhouser on *Rousseau's Critique of Inequality*

- Chapter 1, available through UVic library at <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/core/books/rousseau-critique-of-inequality/BB39BBF3C86BDAD14FBD1E7134405DE6>

Week 10 (Mar 20): Neuhouser on *Rousseau's Critique of Inequality*

- chapter 2 (same link as above)

Week 11 (Mar 27): Neuhouser on *Rousseau's Critique of Inequality*

- chapter 3 (same link as above)

Week 12 (April 3): Neuhouser on *Rousseau's Critique of Inequality*

- chapters 4 & 5 (same link as above)

Background reading:

For other secondary literature, the bibliography of the entry on Rousseau by Christopher Bertram (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rousseau/>) is a good starting point. Some items from there are included in the following list (most of them are available online through the library):

- Brooke, C., 2015, "Rawls on Rousseau and the General Will", in Farr, J. and Williams, D.L. eds, *The General Will After Rousseau*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Canon, J.S., 2022, "Three General Wills in Rousseau", *Review of Politics*, 84: 350–371.
- Cassirer, E, 1954, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. P. Gay, Bloomington: Indiana.
- Cohen, J. 2010, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grace, E. & Kelly, C. (ed.), *The Challenge of Rousseau*, Cambridge University Press, 2012. (in particular chapters 1 and 2)
- McLendon, M.L., 2019, *The Psychology of Inequality: Rousseau's Amour Propre*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rousselière, G., 2021, "Rousseau's Theory of Value and the Case of Women", *European Journal of Philosophy*, 29: 285–298.
- Shklar, J.N., 1969, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sreenivasan, G., 2000, "What is the General Will?", *Philosophical Review* 109: 545–81.